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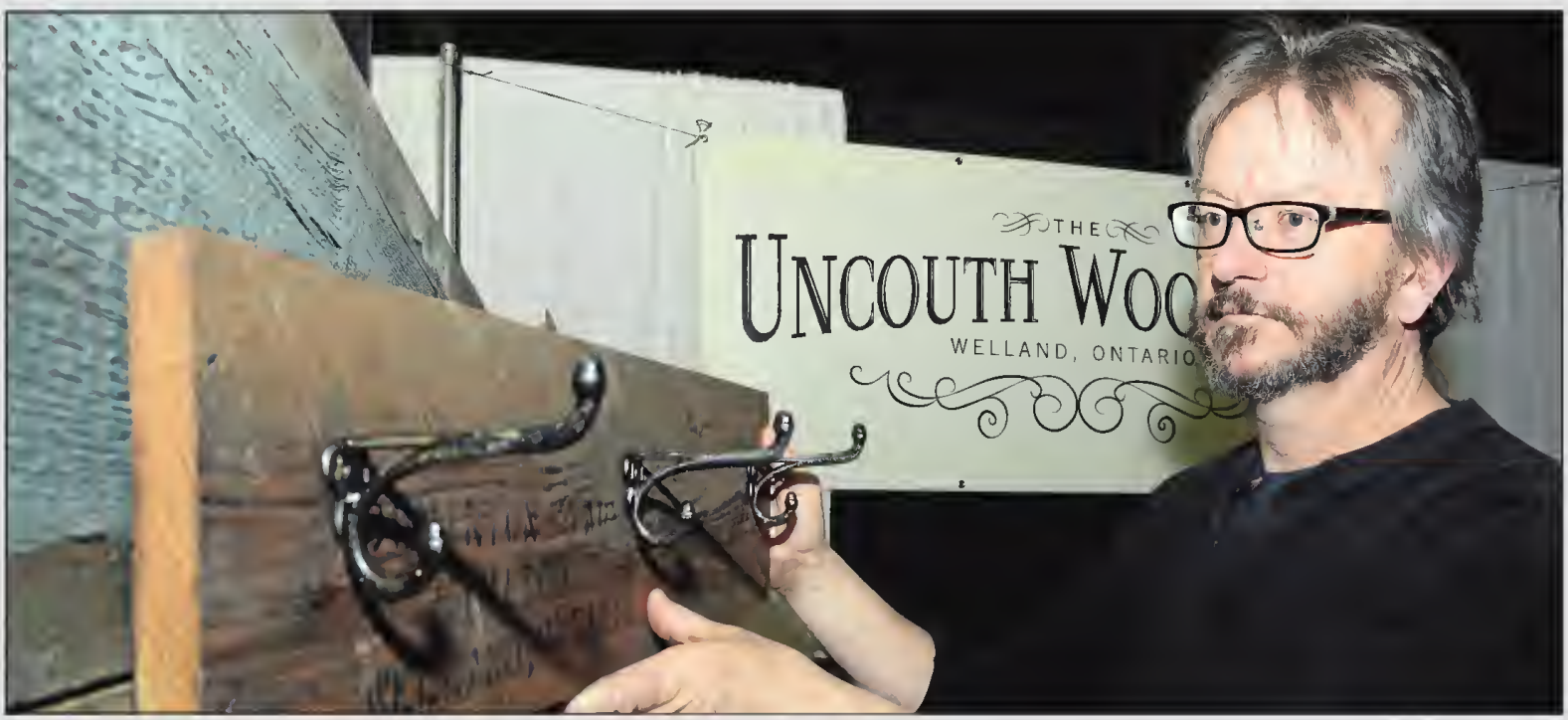
Pelham NEWS

Another successful Home Show



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Andrew Frandsen, owner of Uncouth Woodshop, hangs one of his wooden creations at the Pelham Home and Garden Show on Sunday. See story Page 2.

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UPFRONT

Pelham home show a success

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Fonthill District Kinsmen's 21st annual Pelham Home and Garden Showcase drew good crowds during the three-day event.

With 78 vendors and about 1,400 visitors at Pelham Arena, Kinsmen public relations chairman Kevin Twomey said the showcase was a success.

"We really appreciate the support from the community. We are ecstatic with the number of people, it is definitely up from last year ... so we are pretty pleased with this," he said.

Twomey said what helped make this year's event a success was the assistance of local sponsor Tucker Homes, a local design-and-build construction company.

"They have given us that boost of extra revenue we haven't had in the past to be able to pursue different advertising avenues," added Ryan McKay, the home show chairman and vice-president of the Fonthill Kinsmen club.

Another aspect Twomey said made the event a success was having younger people involved. He said having McKay, who is in his late 20s, as part of the team made a difference because he brought new ideas to the table, including social media.

Twomey said when people support the Kinsmen they aren't just supporting one group; it goes to the whole community. The show's $3 admission fees were donated to Pelham Cares to assist with its services. The rental fee for the vendors will support the Kinsmen's initiatives.

"The money we raise will go back into the community. It can be anything from Community Living, which we support, to Special Olympics," Twomey said.

Twomey said times are tough these days and he doesn't want to see any doors close. The Kinsmen members are working hard to make sure community groups and organizations can keep functioning.

"We want to keep living in Niagara and make a decent quality of life for a lot of people. And that means for those who aren't as fortunate as others," he said.

Affordable housing hope on the horizon

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

It will take more than a vision to end homelessness in Niagara. However, change is within reach.

That was the message Michael Shapcott brought to regional council chambers Thursday as he spoke about the Canadian housing crisis and work that can be done to address issues of affordable housing and homelessness seen locally.

"We want to have a plan, not a dream, and we want to start driving that plan forward," the community-based housing expert and founding member of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness said during a public presentation sponsored by the Social Assistance Reform Network of Niagara.

The first step to creating a course of action is to clearly define the issue locally, Shapcott advised the crowd.

"If you don't clearly define the problem, you will not be able to work toward a solution."

He detailed the path homelessness has taken in Canada from its initial spike in the 1990s. At that time, there was an increase not only in the number of people who were homeless, but also in the type of people, he said. Homelessness in the 1980s predominantly included middle-aged men. In the decade that followed, families and a large number of seniors were finding themselves without shelter — a trend that continues today.

Before solutions can be put in place, Shapcott said there needs to be a solid understanding of the path to homelessness, which can often include financial difficulties, domestic abuse and mental illness.

Complex issues such as homelessness and affordable housing require more complex solutions that may touch on a number of community sectors.

"We don't need simplistic solutions. What we do need is everyone at the table," he said, adding all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors and the community each have a role to play in understanding and tackling distinct local needs. He called that collaboration key to "changing the conversation" and putting an action plan in place.

Shapcott expressed hope that change is on the horizon.

He was optimistic about the federal government's recent budget commitment to consult with advocacy groups and create a national housing strategy.

"It's important to be a part of that discussion," he said, calling it a move that is desperately needed, as Canada has a "severe shortage of affordable and social housing in every part of the country."

It's projected that by 2017, the number of affordable homes in Canada will drop to 492,500 from 626,300 in 2007, Shapcott said.

Despite the housing stock decreasing, waiting lists continue to grow, as they have annually since the 2008 recession.

"We're cutting 22 per cent of our national housing stock and waitlists are growing to unprecedented levels," he said. "No wonder we have a housing crisis. No wonder we have people spilling into the streets."

Shapcott credited the provincial and federal governments for their recent budgets, which included some, though not enough, funding dollars to support affordable housing.

Both budgets, he said, also recognized housing as a fundamental need for all Canadians, marking a change in government mindset.

"We can't continue to cut and divide and say one group is more deserving than another. Everyone has a right to housing."

There has also been recognition by the Ontario and Canadian governments that expertise needs to be brought to the table to properly address the problem.

It's critical that Niagara bring forward information on what government can do to meet the region's specific needs, Shapcott said.

"People need to think nationally and act locally ... Identify practical local initiatives that can be taken forward."

"You're fortunate you don't have to start from scratch," Shapcott said, adding Niagara has a "good history" of promoting advocacy and introducing initiatives.

He spoke about a project underway in Toronto that involves converting surplus school board properties into affordable housing.

It's a potential option Niagara Regional Housing has also been recently reviewing.

There are challenges to overcome to make that a reality, he said, with school boards often feeling it's their duty to get top dollar for the properties, which housing organizations are typically unable to pay.

But solutions, such as land trusts that separate ownership of land and buildings, do exist, making it a viable option, he added.

SAARN chairwoman Gracia Janes said Niagara has been "working on a plan" to address affordable housing and homelessness issues locally.

She noted the recent homeless count that took place throughout the region April 5, during which a small army of volunteers worked to gather information directly from Niagara's homeless, including those on the streets and in local shelters.

"We're getting to know the community in the right way."

Janes called Shapcott's presentation inspiring and said there were many ideas he brought forward that local advocates will look at potentially introducing in the community.

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LOCALNEWS

Niagara 'living wage' about $17.47

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

Life in the region — and the paycheque needed to afford it — has been broken down into dollars and cents.

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network released a report last week that pinpoints the wage that needs to be earned in order to meet the day-to-day expenses of living in Niagara.

The document, released one month after a related report detailing the cost of living in the region, says breadwinners within the average family of four must each earn $17.47 an hour at a full-time job in order to make ends meet.

Calculating the Living Wage for Niagara Region 2016 indicates the total household employment income — prior to tax and payroll deductions — required to support a local family of four is $68,147, or $34,074 per job.

The hope is that by bringing these figures to the forefront, a conversation will be started about where the community stands and where improvements can be made, said network chairman Glen Walker.

BOB TYMCZYSZYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network chairman Glen Walker is shown at his Queenston Street offices in St. Catharines.

The evidence-based "living wage" was calculated based on the cost of basic needs in the area, such as food, shelter and clothing, as well as items that allow for fuller participation in society, including the cost of a cell phone and Internet, family leisure outings and recreation.

The report is intended to not only look at the wage people need to earn to cover expenses, but also at the "economics of what that implies," Walker said.

"We have businesses that are struggling, we have a lot of unemployment and issues around poverty. We wanted to try and develop a report that provides a balanced commentary on what it looks like out there."

Mishka Balsom believes the living wage figure calculated by the network is one many Niagara businesses would be unable to afford.

The president and CEO of Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce said many employers are faced with "slim margins of profit" and would face significant changes to their business models if the increased wage was implemented.

Whenever there is talk of minimum wage increases, Balsom hears concerns from the business community.

"This jump is quite significant," she said while comparing the $17.47 living wage to the existing $11.25 minimum wage, which is set to increase to $11.40 an hour in October.

"Businesses can't pay that."

However, she acknowledged the network has reached out to some Niagara businesses who have put support behind the initiative.

NPRN isn't "jumping up and saying this must be done," Walker said, but is instead asking what role businesses, as well as employers in the not-for-profit and public sectors, can play to help promote change locally.

There are varying factors that would see that living wage flex, including whether medical benefits or life insurance are provided by an employer.

"It's all about that package of support and services," Walker said.

Balsom praised the report for highlighting issues "that make it so costly to live in Niagara," including a lack of inter-municipal transit, which drives up transportation costs, and the high price of daycare.

The living wage rises as a result of those expenses, she said.

"If those issues were addressed, that rate would be significantly decreased. It becomes a completely different picture."

A regional working group is currently in the process of developing a model for inter-municipal transit in Niagara to extend beyond an existing pilot project that is in place.

Balsom also credited the report for raising valid points about the likelihood that increase to a living wage would reduce staff turnover, staff training costs and absenteeism.

"But from a business perspective, you need to see the business case on that," she said, adding more data is needed.

More information is also needed, she said, to determine how the wage increase would offset the more than $1 billion poverty it's estimated to cost Niagara annually, how many businesses would need to come on board to make a significant impact, and how the living wage would fluctuate with different family dynamics.

She also hoped to see more detail about how many employers in Niagara are paying below living wage and how many employees would move from one pay bracket to another if the $17.47 minimum was introduced.

"There are a lot of businesses that are committed to working to reduce poverty but it can't lie on the shoulders of the business community alone," she said.

Balsom said the chamber is open to sitting down with network representatives, just as it did with basic income guarantee advocates, to discuss ways to improve quality of life for Niagarans.

"I think those are welcomed discussions," she said. "We need to address poverty in Niagara."

Getting as many residents as possible to that living wage mark begins with a conversation, Walker said, adding it's a matter of finding the right strategies to get them there.

If that $17.47 mark is unmanageable, it's a chance to discuss other methods that can be pursued to improve local cost of living, he said.

"It's not just about wage. It's about those expenses and what we can do about them. What other strategies can we put in place to lower costs on the other side of the pendulum."

The full report is available at www.wipeoutpoverty.ca.

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Dropping Redmen name right move

Do you remember the old Superfriends television show?

It was a cartoon produced by Hanna-Barbera, the same company that gave the world The Flintstones. It was about a team of superheroes that included the holy trinity of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.

At some point, the producers of Superfriends must have decided it needed a more ethnically diverse cast so they created several new heroes. But this being the 1970s and '80s, they managed to screw it up completely. Every non-white hero on the show was just a train wreck of awful racial stereotypes.

Take the character who was supposed to be a First Nations superhero, Apache Chief.

The intent behind his creation might have been noble, but Apache Chief was just a distillation of the way aboriginal peoples were depicted in popular media.

He didn't speak Apache (his special "magic word" of his people is just gibberish) and he wasn't the chief of his band. He wore a headband and some kind of loincloth. His dialogue (which mostly consisted of ramblings about nature spirits) was slow and stilted, as if Apache Chief had been taught English by Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster.

Apache Chief really bothered me as a child. Growing up in Calgary, many of my schoolmates lived on the Sarcee reserve — now properly called the Tsu T'ina Nation. And not one of those kids, nor their parents, sounded or looked anything like Apache Chief.

As a kid, it seemed deeply unfair. I had Superman to look up to. My friends got this awful caricature of themselves.

A children's cartoon is not the only place it happened, of course.

Sport teams across North America often use First Nations iconography in their names and logos. The Cleveland Indians and their mascot, Chief Wahoo. The Edmonton Eskimos. The Washington Redskins. The Mississauga Tomahawks.

Locally we had the St. Catharines Teepees junior A hockey team, which became the St. Catharines Blackhawks. The Thorold Blackhawks junior B hockey team is still around.

There is a baseball team called the Welland Chiefs. Teams at E.L. Crossley secondary school in Fonthill used to be called the Chiefs as well, but changed the name years ago to the Cyclone.

And until recently, Denis Morris high school in St. Catharines used the nickname Redmen for its teams and even featured the typical "Indian brave"-style logo until the 1990s. The school announced last week it is dropping the name Redmen altogether and will have a new one for the next school year.

Some of these nicknames and associated logos and mascots are more egregious than others, but we shouldn't judge the designers too harshly.

After all, no one sets out to name their team after something derogatory. They want a name that is distinctive and positive.

Like the creators of Apache Chief, the owners of these teams didn't sit around thinking, "how can we create the most offensive team name possible?"

Still, ask yourself if you want your culture represented in the sbambling figure of Apache Chief. Or the cartoonish buffoonery of Chief Wahoo and his ilk.

If that was how you were presented to the world, how would you feel?

We need to understand these nicknames are usually derived from racial stereotypes that find their origin in the period of colonization of the Americas. And like all such stereotypes, they are designed to dehumanize and belittle their targets.

Denis Morris should be applauded for abandoning the name Redmen, recognizing that while those who like the name don't have a malicious intent, it is still problematic for First Nations students.

I am certain there are those who think this is just political correctness run amok, ruining "tradition" to avoid being offensive.

It's not about being politically correct. It's about being decent human beings.

Would it be all right to name a high school football team the Yellowskins and use a drawing of Mr. Yunioshi from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* as the team logo?

If you understand why that isn't OK, then you should understand the problem with Redmen.

And if clinging to these sorts of racial stereotypes is your "tradition," I suggest it is not a tradition worth preserving. The zeitgeist moves on.

This is ultimately about treating other people with the same degree of respect and decency you want for yourself.

And that is really not too much to ask.

LAKE TO LAKE PODCAST

Episode 6 of the Lake to Lake podcast looks at the issue of the use of First Nations stereotypes and imagery in popular culture. The episode will be posted online at 4:30 p.m. Friday on our website.

Mandatory minimum sentences were bad idea

When it comes to Canada's criminal justice system, the popular political play in recent years has been to follow our American neighbours and mimic their embrace of "tough on crime" laws with hard and fast rules for mandatory minimum punishments.

The election of Justin Trudeau's Liberals signalled Canadians may be ready to rethink the wide array of ironclad minimum sentences. That's a good thing in light of a recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling.

A majority of the high court ruled in a decision recently that the mandatory one-year prison sentence prescribed for drug trafficking for someone with a previous trafficking conviction amounted to cruel and unusual punishment under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, writing for the majority, said the minimum sentence cast too wide a net, snagging not just serious drug traffickers but also those involved in conduct "much less blame worthy." Canadians would be shocked by its potentially broad application, she wrote.

The ruling does not mean that all mandatory minimums in Canadian law violate the Charter. Some past decisions found mandatory minimums are not by themselves unconstitutional.

The majority advised, though, that Parliament should consider narrowing the reach of mandatory minimums.

That -- combined with a 2015 ruling that quashed the three-year mandatory minimum sentence for some gun-related crimes -- means the Liberals are on the right track with a review of recent changes in the justice system.

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Next stage for new hospital

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

Plans for a new south Niagara hospital in Niagara Falls are "progressing very well," says Suzanne Johnston, president of the Niagara Health System.

The first stage of the project, which involved the clinical visioning and development of a site plan, has been submitted to the provincial health ministry for approval, she said.

"Stage one is like setting forth with the principles of design, looking at the numbers of individuals that need to be served," Johnston said.

"It was about designing big blocks of space, almost envisioning sort of lego blocks that would fit side by side. A good example would be, if an emergency room is here, what are the kinds of adjacencies we need to make that flow work?"

She said stage two, which they're moving into now, will include filling in the "finite details" of what will be in those blocks.

"If you took the emergency room, for example, it would be what shape will the emergency room have? What number of stretchers will the emergency room have, or patient bay areas to treat people? How many people are we expecting to visit the emergency room? What size and shape will it look like?"

Johnston said the completed stage two design will be submitted to the provincial health ministry in November.

"We'll be involving patients in that design, as well as the clinicians, and, of course, the architects and developers will lead that."

Stage three will include the design build plan and should begin in November.

"That's actually when we really start to say, 'this is the design that we're going to build,' and it will go out to (a request for proposal, RFP)," she said.

"That's not the RFP, that is the shovel in the ground. It's for the design development."

Johnston said she's "very proud" of the NHS team "because it's a tremendous amount of work, all the while running a health-care system that was awarded exemplary status by Accreditation Canada."

Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates met with Johnston and NHS chief executive officer Kevin Smith Tuesday to discuss the project.

"It was a productive meeting and I'm happy to see that we've finally moved into stage two — though I believe this project can and should move quicker," Gates said.

He said the new Niagara Falls hospital is projected to be 300,000 square feet larger than the hospital in St. Catharines, and it will be one of the first hospitals in Canada where the vast majority of beds will be in private rooms.

Gates said increased pressure on the health ministry could see the project completed by 2021 instead of the projected 2023.

"I would still like to see construction on this project begin much sooner than is currently planned," the New Democrat said.

"I've said it for years that we have a plan in place, we have the land and we have a local workforce who can make this happen. There's no need to wait. People need access to this care immediately — let's get it done together."

In 2013, the Grassl family, Toronto businesspeople who own property in Niagara Falls, donated 29.6 acres of land at the corner of Montrose Road and Biggar roads for a proposed hospital to serve south Niagara.

Gates said once the project enters stage three, he plans to put pressure on the Liberal government to use local workers for the build.

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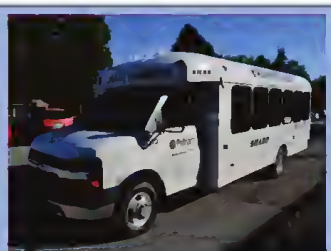

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Voters say Queenston St. among worst roads

LAURA BARTON
Special to Postmedia Network

CAA's Worst Roads campaign doesn't just stop at listing the roads everyone complains about — it helps municipalities know which roads need the most attention.

"We believe it's important to let the Niagara community know how its voting has effected change," says Drew Chamberlain, CAA Niagara's president and CEO.

Last year's worst roads in Niagara were in Fort Erie, St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls. CAA Niagara just released an update stating when residents can expect to see improvements to those roads.

Stanley Avenue in Niagara Falls, fourth worst, subsequently had construction work done on it last year and any further work that needs to be done is set to be finished this spring.

The other roads on the list, however, don't have start dates for repair before 2017.

Dominion Road in Fort Erie and Queenston Street in St. Catharines, which were first and second respectively, will start getting repaired in 2017. Construction on Lakeshore Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake will begin in 2018 and on Drummond Road in Niagara Falls in 2020.

"I encourage people to continue to vote because it is making a difference," Chamberlain says.

The 2016 Worst Roads voting campaign is well underway.

"We've seen a lot of engagement from Niagara residents," says Alex Pederson, CAA's public relations co-ordinator. "We are tracking votes and are well ahead of last year's vote count."

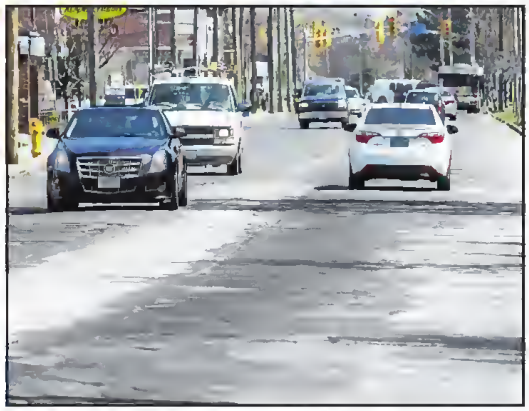
So far the top five is full of repeat offenders, with only one new addition of Grantham Avenue, at last check the second road listed for St. Catharines.

The list seems to be repeating itself because construction for those roads hasn't yet started, Pederson said.

Queenston Street had moved its way up into the top spot for Niagara's list — as well as for all of Ontario.

Voting is open until April 29. Voters are entered into a weekly draw for 100 CAA dollars and one draw for $2,500 worth of gas.

To have a say in which roads deserve a spot on the list, go to www.CAA-WorstRoads.com.



BOB TYMCZYSZYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Queenston Street between Price and Tasker streets in St. Catharines is in particularly poor condition.

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LOCALNEWS

IN BRIEF

Inquest into jail death set for May

A date has been set for an inquest into the death of an American man who died at Niagara Detention Centre.

Joseph Charles Dunn, 43, was in the custody of Canadian Border Services Agency at the Thorold jail when he died Sept. 27, 2014.

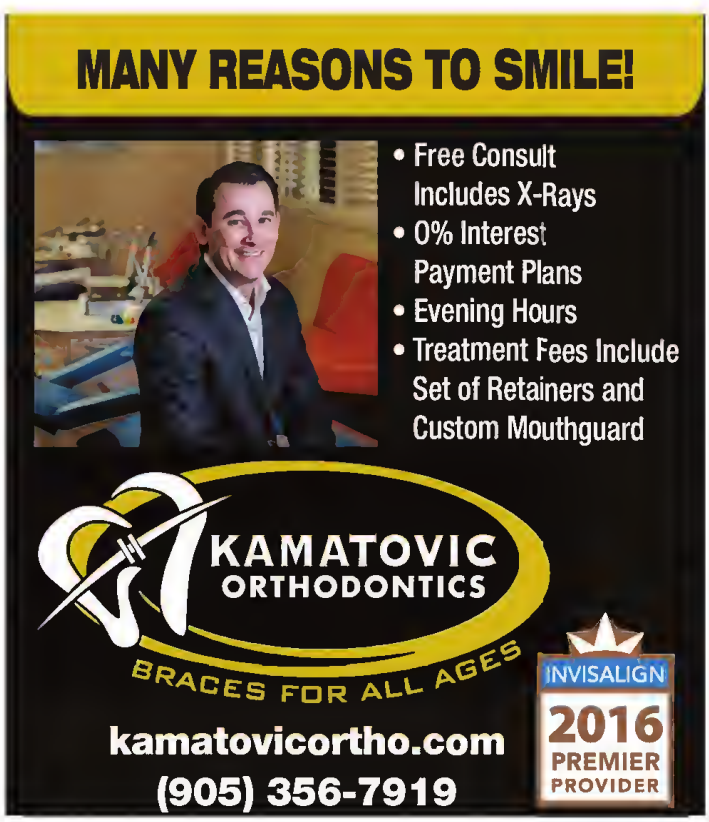
Dunn had been indicted in Georgia earlier that month on charges of child cruelty in connection with the death of his 20-month-old foster son in Locust Grove, south of Atlanta. He fled to the Niagara border and filed a refugee claim in Canada.

The inquest will examine events surrounding Dunn's death. A jury may make recommendations in an effort to prevent similar deaths.

It will begin Monday, May 2, at 9:30 a.m. at the Welland Courthouse at 102 East Main St. The inquest is expected to last five days and will hear from approximately 10 witnesses.

Regional coroner for inquests Dr. David Eden will preside as inquest coroner and Graeme Leach will be counsel to the coroner.

Joseph Charles Dunn



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IN BRIEF

Arrests follow alleged Niagara crime spree

Two St. Catharines residents face a number of charges following an alleged Monday crime spree.

Niagara Regional Police say at 6 a.m. the NRP, Ontario Provincial Police and Niagara Emergency Medical Services responded to a single-vehicle collision in the Highway 406 roundabout in Welland.

Police say witnesses saw a male and female flee from the vehicle, which turned out to be stolen from Toronto.

Shortly after that, the suspects were located nearby and apprehended.

Police say an investigation revealed the couple had gone on an alleged crime spree over the weekend. Those activities spanned St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland and Port Colborne.

Roger Morgan, 34, and Sandra Haslett, 38, both from St. Catharines, were arrested and face a number of changes.

Joint charges include three counts of possession of property obtained by crime under $5,000, two counts of theft under $5,000 and fraudulently obtaining food and beverage.

Morgan is also separately charged with theft over $5,000, uttering threats, operating a vehicle while disqualified, failure to stop at the scene of accident and failing to comply with recognizance.

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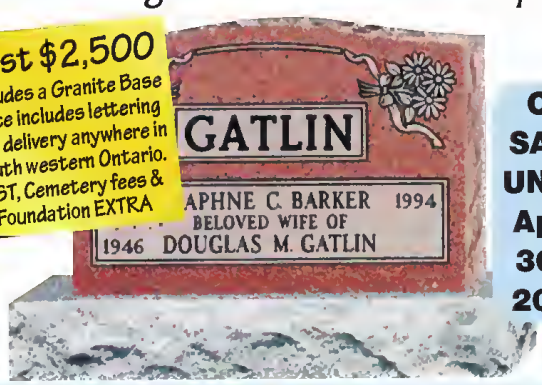

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LOCALNEWS

Trade zones have limited impact, so far

JULIE JOCSAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey chats with the crowd following an announcement about a Foreign Trade Zone in Niagara in St. Catharines on Friday, April 15. Niagara's new status will help foster private sector investment in the region and create jobs by providing access to government programs that defer or eliminate duties and taxes from products destined for export.

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Niagara's new status as a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) Point will make the region more attractive to investors, but the change won't happen overnight.

Other areas across the country that have been designated FTZ have seen limited success as a result.

The designation announced this month — the culmination of a decade of work by local economic development organizations — gives the region a competitive edge in luring investment, by offering easier access to government programs allowing qualified companies the ability to defer taxes and tariffs charged on goods being imported.

In 2008, a free trade zone was established in Winnipeg as a pilot project.

And in the eight years since, CentrePort spokesperson Riva Harrison said, three new customs bonded warehouses have set up shop in Manitoba's capital city as a direct result of the designation.

"I'm going to call it a moderate level of success," she said.

One of the new warehouses in CentrePort imports specialty beers and ciders, usually from European countries, she said. The products are stored at the warehouse and then distributed throughout North America.

A foreign trade zone was designated in Regina last August, called the Global Transportation Hub.

Since it has only been in place for eight months, Global Transportation's spokesperson Kelly Brossart isn't surprised the city has yet to see a new industry set up shop there.

"It's important for people to realize that decisions to invest millions of dollars in an opportunity are not made very lightly, and they do take a long time to come to fruition," she said. "There are a number of opportunities that we are working on."

Nevertheless, she said it has made Saskatchewan's capital city more attractive to foreign investors.

"It does offer them that eligibility for the different programs that the federal government offers, like tariff and tax exemptions and duty deferrals," she said.

For potential investors, having an FTZ designation is "one of the key items on the checklist."

"It definitely keeps a geography from being excluded from consideration, because it is something that the foreign investor is looking for," Brossart said.

Despite the limited success, Harrison said Winnipeg's FTZ remains "an important tool to have in terms of marketing for business attraction and foreign investment," along with other incentives and amenities — not unlike Niagara's Gateway Economic Zone status.

She said the FTZ was established as a pilot project, to find a way to make it easier for industries to take advantage of federal government programs that can help reduce or eliminate tariffs and taxes on imported goods. Although those programs had been previously available, she said very few companies applied for them because they were too complicated, involving too many government departments.

"It just seemed to be more trouble than it was worth," she said.

But the FTZs were geared towards making access to those programs easier for companies by creating a task force to fast track applications for companies, and marketing the benefits of the programs.

"This is a new, more centralized approach where it allows a jurisdiction to market it, to have sort of a single-window approach for applications, to have a task force with the expertise to go through the applications and advise companies."

Harrison said the FTZ programs aren't for everyone.

She said the program "isn't a one-size-fits-all benefit that every company will be able to tap into. It will apply to very specific situations, which will have to be assessed on a case by case basis."

Niagara is the seventh region to receive the designation.

Last June, two FTZs were established in Alberta, including one at the Edmonton airport and the second in Calgary.

An FTZ was created in Halifax a month later, and Port of Sydney in Nova Scotia was designated in February this year.

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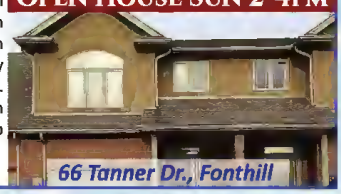

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LOCALNEWS

Niagara deaths tied to fentanyl

KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network

Two people in Niagara have died in the past six weeks taking fentanyl illegally, as police continue to try and get the deadly prescription painkiller off the streets.

"It's an incredibly fatal drug," said Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire during a police services board meeting last Thursday.

McGuire said there have been about 500 deaths across the country and a number of fatalities in Niagara in relation to the illicit use of fentanyl in the past five years, including the two recent deaths.

"It's an incredible problem," he said.

So much so that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police launched a website earlier this year with Humber College to deal with the fentanyl crisis. The site at www.facethefentanyl.ca provides information about the drug's effects, signs of overdoses and where to get emergency medication to combat it.

"If anyone is interested or knows anyone involved in this particular type of drug or needs further information, there are all sorts of resources on that site to try and bring this epidemic, which is what it's become, to an end," McGuire said.

In addition to the fatalities, Niagara has seen a string of robberies at pharmacies where fentanyl is being stolen and sold illegally.

The drug is said to be stronger than morphine, more addictive than heroin and potentially fatal in minutes.

Earlier this month, the morality unit conducted an investigation into trafficking of fentanyl in Niagara Falls and seized $4,700 worth of fentanyl patches along with other drugs and cash.

In January, Grimsby district police launched an investigation into prescription fraud in which fentanyl patches were obtained.

While fentanyl is still impacting Niagara, police are also keeping their eyes open for the next possible drug crisis — the even more deadly W-18.

Billed 100 times more lethal than fentanyl, the synthetic opioid has surfaced in Alberta. McGuire said both the Canadian and Ontario associations of chiefs of police are aware of it.

"It is a very dangerous drug that's come forward and we are aware of it in the law enforcement community," he said.

"We haven't seen it here yet but it is extremely dangerous."

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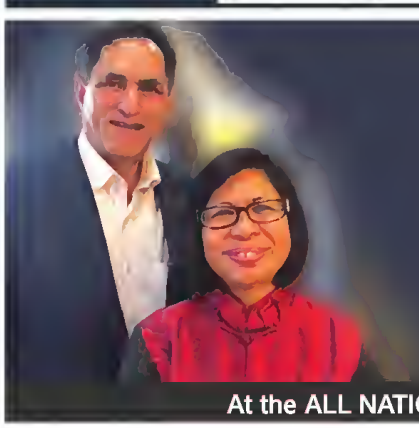
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LOCALNEWS

Fentanyl bust nets 30-month jail term

ALISON LANGLEY
Postmedia Network

Fentanyl is such a dangerous drug that substantial jail terms are needed for dealers in order to deter like-minded individuals, a judge said last Thursday.

"A strong message needs to be sent," Judge Nathalie Gregson said in Ontario Court of Justice in Welland.

"Protection of our society from dangerous drugs is paramount."

Krista Curtis, 34, was sentenced to 30 months behind bars on charges of possession of a substance for the purpose of trafficking and breach of recognizance.

The St. Catharines resident had pleaded not guilty to the charges and was found guilty following a trial in October 2015.

Curtis was arrested after police found her in possession of four fentanyl patches which where hidden in the folds of her stomach.

Court heard Curtis had a valid prescription for the drug and feels she was wrongly convicted. The judge said the woman's substance abuse issues "lead her to a life of crime," although the defendant maintains she is not addicted to drugs.

The federal prosecutor had been seeking a jail term in the range of four to six years while defence lawyer Mark Evans had argued for a sentence on the lower end of that scale in light of his client's difficult childhood and the modest amount of drugs she was caught with.

"I do have empathy for Ms. Curtis," the judge said. "Both her parents had substance abuse issues."

Gregson added the fact Curtis was previously convicted of a similar drug offence was "troubling" as the time she spent behind bars did not stop her from returning to drugs once she was released.

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Fire causes $50,000 damage to garage

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Welland Fire and Emergency Services were called to an afternoon garage fire on Saturday

The detached garage at 22 Forks Rd. was completely destroyed by the fire.

Platoon chief Drew Clements said the damage is estimated to be about $50,000. He said there was a 1973 Oldsmobile Delta 88 inside the garage, which was also destroyed.

Clements said the homeowner was doing some angle grinding earlier in the day, which may have caused the fire.

"It's still under investigation at this time. It was probably due to some grass and embers and materials," he said.

Firefighters were dispatched at about 4:30 p.m.

Clements said it took about 20 minutes for firefighters to control the fire.

He said no one was inside when the fire began and there were no injuries.

There was additional heat damage to a neighbouring garage and fence.

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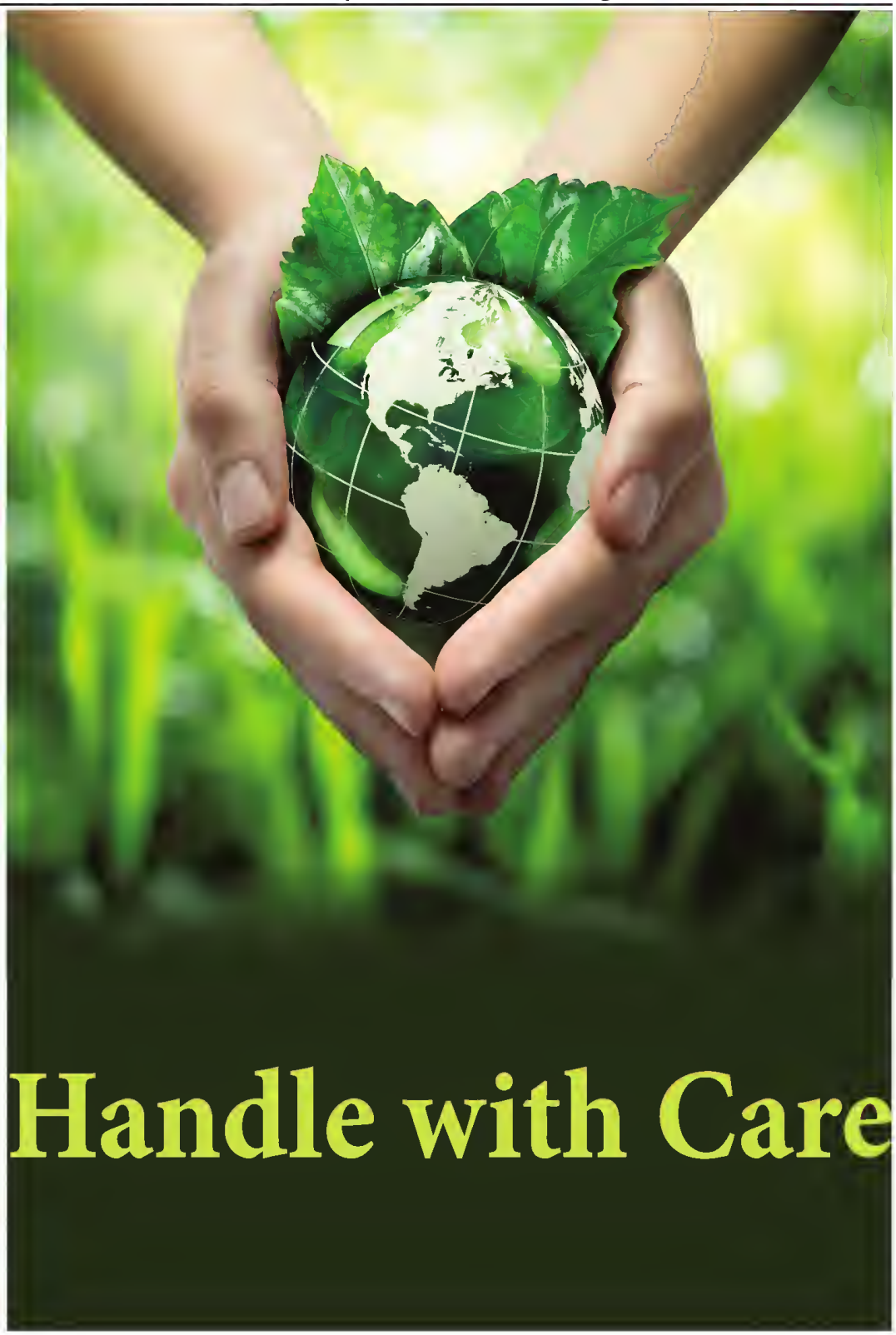

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